

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 /083 W
-----082865 070842Z /10

R 061500Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7980
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 3303

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SF
SUBJECT: NEW OPPOSITION PARTY FORMED

REF: (A) CAPE TOWN 171, AND PREVIOUS, (B) PRETORIA 2729,

1. SUMMARY: THE UNITED PARTY (UP), SOUTH AFRICA'S OFFICIAL
OPPOSITION PARTY FOR TWENTY-NINE YEARS, FORMALLY DISBANDED
AND MERGED JUNE 29 WITH TINY DEMOCRATIC PARTY TO FORM NEW
REPUBLIC PARTY, WHICH BECOMES OFFICIAL PARLIAMENTARY
OPPOSITION PARTY. NEW PARTY EXPECTED FOR PRESENT TO KEEP
PLURALITY OF OPPOSITION SEATS, BUT ITS MARGIN HAS BEEN REDUCED BY
SIX "BASSONITE" MP'S AND ITS FUTURE IS IN DOUBT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE UNITED PARTY, SOUTH AFRICA'S OFFICIAL OPPOSITION
FOR TWENTY-NINE YEARS, FORMALLY DISBANDED ON JUNE 28
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AND THE NEXT DAY FORMED, WITH THE TINY DEMOCRATIC PARTY,
THE NEW REPUBLIC PARTY (NRP). AT FIRST FORMAL MEETING
JUNE 29, THE NEW PARTY ADOPTED A PLATFORM WHICH STRADDLES
POLITICAL GROUND BETWEEN THE PROGRESSIVE REFORM PARTY (PRP)
AND THE NATIONAL PARTY (NP) AND ELECTED RADCLYFFE CADMAN,
NATAL MP, AS PARLIAMENTARY LEADER.

3. THE PARTY PLATFORM, WHICH BASICALLY MIRRORS OLD UP IDEALS, ADVOCATES A MULTI-RACIAL CONFEDERAL STATE IN WHICH ALL CITIZENS WOULD HAVE EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING, EQUAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, AND EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW. HOWEVER, IT ALSO DEFENDS "GROUP IDENTITY," RACIALLY-DEFINES RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS, FULL DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOMELANDS TOWARD AUTONOMY OR INDEPENDENCE, AND MAXIMUM LOCAL AUTONOMY FOR EACH RACIAL GROUP OVER ITS OWN AFFAIRS IN ITS OWN RESIDENTIAL AREAS. A COUNCIL OF STATE, MADE UP OF REPRESENTATIVES OF EACH GROUP, WOULD HAVE FULL POWER OVER NATIONAL MATTERS SUCH AS FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE, AND TRANSPORTATION ON AN INTERIM BASIS UNTIL A CONFEDERAL CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM IS CREATED. URBAN AFRICANS, ACCORDING TO THE PLATFORM, WOULD HAVE EQUAL CIVIL RIGHTS AND LOCAL AUTONOMY, BUT THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS WOULD, FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, BE EXERCISED ONLY THROUGH THE HOMELANDS. ONLY AFTER A MULTI-RACIAL COMMISSION STUDIED THE QUESTION COMPLETELY WOULD THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN POLITICAL RIGHTS OUTSIDE THE HOMELANDS BE CONSIDERED.

4. CADMAN'S ELEVATION CAME AFTER SIR DE VILLIERS GRAAFF, UP'S AND PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION'S LEADER FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS, FORMALLY STEPPED DOWN AT UP DISSOLUTION MEETING. AT A CAUCUS OF 24 UP MPS AFTER THAT MEETING, CADMAN, WHOSE ELECTION WAS WIDELY PREDICTED, WAS NAMED PARLIAMENTARY LEADER AND, THEREFORE, OPPOSITION LEADER. KNOWN AS AN ALOOF AND REMORSELESS CRITIC OF THE SAG, CADMAN WAS ONE OF INNOVATORS OF NATAL TURNHALLE
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PROPOSAL AND OTHER MOVES IN THAT PROVINCE TOWARD MULTI-RACIAL CONSULTATION. HE IS EXPECTED TO GIVE NRP STRONG, VERLIGTE IMAGE.

5. UP'S DISSOLUTION, AFTER FORTY-THREE YEARS OF EXISTENCE, CAME AFTER GRAAFF ANNOUNCED AUGUST 26, 1976 A CAMPAIGN TO "SAVE SOUTH AFRICA." GRAAFF PROPOSED THAT IN NEW CRITICAL ERA SOUTH AFRICA FACED AFTER SOWETO RIOTS, UNITED OPPOSITION WAS NEEDED TO GIVE NATION TRULY VIABLE ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT WHICH COULD ERADICATE APARTHEID AND UNITE ALL RACIAL GROUPS. DESPITE SUBSEQUENT LENGTHY NEGOTIATIONS WITH BOTH THE PRP AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY (REF A), UP COULD ONLY COME TO FINAL AGREEMENT WITH LATTER. PRP, INSISTING THAT UNITED OPPOSITION NOT BE BASED ON "ETHNIC POLITICS" AND SEPARATION OF RACES, LEFT NEGOTIATIONS WHEN UP INSISTED ON RECOGNITION OF "GROUP IDENTITIES" AND RACIALLY-DEFINED RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS.

6. THIS SET THE STAGE FOR JUNE 28 UP AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY DISSOLUTION MEETINGS. DURING EXTENSIVE AND OFTEN HEATED DEBATE OVER DISSOLUTION, SMALL GROUP OF VERLIGTES, LED BY TRANSVAAL MP JAPIE BASSON, PROPOSED THAT DISSOLUTION BE POSTPONED UNTIL ALL OPPOSITION PARTIES AGREED ON COMMON PLATFORM. UNTIL THIS WAS DONE, THEY ARGUED UP WOULD LOSE NOT ONLY ITS NAME, BUT ALSO

IDENTITY AND ELECTORAL STRENGTH. INSTEAD, THEY PROPOSED, CONFERENCE SHOULD ELECT NEW LEADER AND CONTINUE TO NEGOTIATE UNTIL TRULY UNITED OPPOSITION FORMED. PROPOSAL WAS SOUNDLY DEFEATED, AND 600 CONFERENCE DELEGATES FORMALLY VOTED PARTY'S DISBANDMENT. DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S 50 DELEGATES WERE CONVENED SAME EVENING BY LEADER THEO GERDENER, FORMER NP CABINET MEMBER, AND ALSO DISSOLVED.

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-----083114 070841Z /10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRETORIA 3303

7. AT NEW PARTY'S FIRST CONGRESS JUNE 29, DELEGATES NAMED GRAAFF INTERIM PARTY LEADER. A FEDERAL PARTY COUNCIL, CONSISTING OF 12 DELEGATES FROM EACH PROVINCE AND A 14-MAN FEDERAL EXECUTIVE WAS CREATED TO BEGIN FORMULATING PARTY POLICY AND TO DECIDE PROCESS FOR ELECTING PERMANENT LEADER. MP VAUSE RAW, GRAAFF, GERDENER, AND CADMAN WILL COMPRISE EXECUTIVE'S LEADERSHIP.

8. BASSON AND FIVE OTHER MPS(NIC OLIVIER, DERICK DE VILLIERS, HYMIE MILLER, HAROLD VAN HOOGSTATEN, GRAHAM MCINTOSH), DISGRUNTLED AT TURN OF EVENTS, ANNOUNCED BEFORE NRP CONVENTION THAT THEY AND OTHER EX-UP VERLIGTES HAD BEGUN NEGOTIATIONS WITH PRP TO FORM A UNITED VERLIGTE OPPOSITION. COLIN EGLIN, PRP LEADER, TOLD A CONOFF THAT BASSON AND FOLLOWERS HAD AGREED TO

TAKE STEP THREE DAYS BEFORE CONVENTION, BUT HAD HELD OFF
ANNOUNCEMENT TO INSURE NONE WERE CUT OUT OF UP DISSOLUTION MEET-
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INT. ALTHOUGH SIX MPS SAID THEY WOULDN'T JOIN PRP FOR MOMENT,
BASSON ANNOUNCED JUNE 30 FORMATION OF COMMITTEE FOR A UNITED
OPPOSITION
(CUO) TO REPRESENT UP DISSIDENTS IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH PRP
AIMING AT CREATION OF BROAD-BASED VERLIGTE OPPOSITION PARTY.

9. TWO DAYS BEFORE UP DISSOLUTION MEETING, EGLIN AND PRP
ANNOUNCED THAT THEY PLAN TO START A "CONVENTION MOVEMENT" TO
EDUCATE AND PREPARE SOUTH AFRICANS, OVER THE LONG TERM, TO
ACCEPT NEED TO COME TOGETHER AND WORK OUT SOLUTIONS FOR
PROBLEMS IN EVENTUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION OF ALL RACE GROUPS.
ALTHOUGH PLANS FOR MOVEMENT ARE STILL VAGUE, ALLIANCE WITH EX-UP
VERLIGTES AND CALL BY LATTER FOR BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
TO SUPPORT UNITED VERLIGTE FRONT HAS GIVEN PROPOSAL ADDED IMPETUS.

10. NEW OPPOSITION PARLIAMENTARY ALIGNMENT AFTER FORMATION OF
NRP SHOWS LATTER WITH 24 MP'S, PRP-BASSON GROUP WITH 18, AND
SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY (SAP) WITH 6. IN SIX MONTHS BEFORE NEXT
PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, SAP AND PRP WILL ATTEMPT TO LURE
SUPPORTERS FROM NRP WHILE LATTER WILL ATTEMPT TO CONVINCE MP'S
AND ELECTORATE THAT ITS BROAD MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD APPROACH IS
BEST SOLUTION TO SOUTH AFRICA'S NAGGING PROBLEMS. THE FIRST
OPPORTUNITY FOR THE THREE TO TEST THEIR ELECTORAL STRENGTH WILL
LIKELY BE THE BY-ELECTION FOR UP LEADER GIDEON JACOBS' SEAT IN
HILLBROW WHICH HE INTENDS TO VACATE SOON.

11. COMMENT: THE REINCARNATION OF THE UP INTO THE NRP DOES
LITTLE TO INJECT CLARITY INTO SOUTH AFRICA'S OPPOSITION POLITICS.
NOR DOES IT SEEM LIKELY TO DO MUCH FOR THE PARTY ITSELF. NRP
SUPPORTERS OF COURSE HOPE THE FACE-LIFTING WILL HELP HALT THE
DETERIORATION IN THE PARTY'S FORTUNES AND GIVE IT A NEW LEASE
ON LIFE. WHILE THE NRP MAY FOR A TIME BE ABLE TO HOLD ITS OWN,
IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE THESE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AS ANYTHING
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BUT ANOTHER STAGE IN A LONG, INEXORABLE DECLINE.

12. THE PRP, FOR ITS PART, HAS HOPES OF REPLACING THE NRP
RELATIVELY SOON AS THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION. THESE HOPES ARE
BASED SUBSTANTIALLY ON THE EXPECTATION THAT DISSATISFACTION WITH
THE UP OLD GUARD WHICH DOMINATES THE NRP WILL PERSIST AND THAT
BLACK-WHITE TENSIONS WILL TEND TO FORCE WHITES TO LEAVE THE

POLITICAL CENTER AND CHOOSE BETWEEN NATIONALIST CONFRONTATION
AND PRP ACCOMMODATION.

13. A DIFFICULTY WITH THE PRP VIEW IS THAT, AT LEAST AS REVEALED
BY THE LATEST PROVINCIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS (CAPE
TOWN 337), THE TREND AMONG THE ELECTORATE IS PREDOMINANTLY IN A
CONSERVATIVE DIRECTION. THAT TENDENCY MAY NOW BE EVEN STRONGER
WITH SO MANY WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS FEELING THREATENED AND BELEAG-
URED BY DOMESTIC RACIAL DISORDER AND RISING INTERNATIONAL
PRESSURES. CERTAINLY THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT IS DOING
EVERYTHING IT CAN TO NURTURE THIS SPIRIT. THE APPEAL OF THE
PRP'S COURSE OF ACCOMMODATION IS AT BEST UNCERTAIN AT THIS POINT.

14. THE OUTLOOK FOR THE SAP REMAINS UNSURE. THE PARTY IS YET
TO BE TESTED AT THE POLLS. IT IS A HOME FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING
VOTERS WHO ARE IN SUBSTANTIAL AGREEMENT WITH NATIONALIST RACIAL
POLICIES BUT WHO CANNOT BRING THEMSELVES TO VOTE FOR THAT OVER-
WHELMINGLY AFRIKANER PARTY. MERGER WITH THE MOTHER PARTY, NOW
THE NRP, IS A POSSIBILITY. SAP CHAIRMAN JOHN WILEY SAID JULY 5
THAT THERE WAS ENOUGH COMMON GROUND FOR EXPLORATORY TALKS
WITH THE NRP, ON CONDITION THE LATTER SHUNNED NEGOTIATIONS
WITH THE PRP. AN SAP-NRP COALITION COULD HEAD OFF THE PRP
BID TO BECOME THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION, BUT AT THIS EARLY STAGE
THE NRP WOULD PRSUMABLY WANT TO HANDLE THE WILEY OVERTURE
CAUTIOUSLY. A MOVE TO COALESCE WITH SAP COULD CAUSE FURTHER
INTERNAL DISSENTION IN THE NRP AND DAMAGE ANY APPEAL IT HOPES
TO MAKE TO MORE LIBERAL ELEMENTS. ACCORDING TO JULY 6 PRESS
REPORTS, CADMAN HAS IN FACT REJECTED WILEY, SAYING HE IS
LOOKING FOR BROAD BASED SUPPORT, INCLUDING THE PRP.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: OPPOSITION PARTIES, ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 06-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PRETOR03303
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770240-1252
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From: PRETORIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
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Office: ACTION AF
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 CAPE TOWN 171, 77 PRETORIA 2729
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1950921
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW OPPOSITION PARTY FORMED
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SF
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/be763570-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009